

The Division of Youth and Family Services

NJ's Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) helps families keep their children safe and works to improve the quality of life for children.

DYFS is New Jersey's family and child protection/child welfare agency. It is required by law to investigate all reports of suspected child abuse, neglect, exploitation and abandonment. DYFS employs more than 1,400 caseworkers who advocate and provide services for New Jersey's children at risk. It manages placement services for those children whose parents are unable or unwilling to care for them. This includes foster care, residential care and adoption services.

The Division also provides protective and rehabilitative services for these children and their families, including follow-up services. DYFS is responsible for licensing child care centers, foster and adoptive homes, children's group homes, juvenile shelters and residential facilities. In addition, it investigates complaints and conducts child abuse record information background checks to ensure the safety and well being of children in these programs.

Each year, DYFS provides services to approximately 75,000 children and their families. This includes information and referral services, child protection and community-based programs like counseling, parenting skills and home-maker skills that help families get the supports they need to stay together. The Division also operates a 24-hour hotline to receive reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. The Office of Child Abuse Control hotline is linked with a statewide network of Special Response Units made up of caseworkers who respond to emergency reports after hours.

In Fiscal Year 2000, DYFS continued to carry out a Foster Care Reform and Permanency Initiative in response to the Federal Adoption



and Safe Families Act. Between Fiscal Years 1999 and 2000, DYFS received \$22 million for this initiative. In Fiscal Year 2000, hard work began to pay off as many programs got up and running and families started to receive much needed services. The focus changed from temporary placement to permanent care as DYFS programs concentrated on finding permanent placement as soon as possible for New Jersey's at-risk and hard-to-place children.

In Fiscal Year 2000, DYFS also initiated a Foster-Adopt Program, allowing prospective parents to take in foster children and begin adoption procedures as soon as possible.

To support the Foster-Adopt program and as a part of the reform and permanency initiative, DYFS introduced the Home Ownership for Permanency Program (HOPP). HOPP offers a new house at a reduced rate mortgage, no down payment and low interest rate for families who agree to adopt a foster child with special needs such as developmental disabilities, or excessive medical or behavioral issues. The incentive helps to eliminate some of the obstacles foster parents encounter as they struggle to house their growing families while, at

the same time, providing a safe, stable environment for children.

**FY'01 Total DYFS Budget
\$521,311,000**